

A FIRE IN THE WEST

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis paper is to explore the ways in which my masters education was actualized in the form of putting together a 15 to 20 minute solo performance, without faculty assistance. The entire experience was an exercise in shifting objectives, re-writes, and adaptation to a limited set of technical resources (lighting, sound, etc). I had set an ultimate goal of speaking to a specific and perhaps even dissonant personal truth through the vessel of story, and believe this was achieved. The question at hand was what does it mean for the concept of the “terrorist” or the more palatable “revolutionary”, to be so fundamental to the existence and resistance of a colonized people, in my case Palestinians both in Diaspora and at home, and yet weaponized against that group by a state founded in the dogma of imperial, white supremacist, domination. The might is right ethic. Essentially, if the term “terrorist” is meted out by those with all of the power, does the term carry any real significance? In fact, is possibly worth embracing by those against whom it is intended to be wielded? Every step of the way the relationship of the

performer to the audience was a primary consideration, something common to contemporary theatrical thinking. However in this particular instance I was reckoning not only with the relationship of the performer to the audience, but that of the politicized brown body in a predominantly white space, discussing the issues of the brown man in the west, an endeavor fraught with the inherent mistrust given to the brown, Arab voice in the western world.

Months prior to the first drafts of the piece, I had been mulling over the idea of presenting in the solo show a perspective that is in some regard inherent to the community I come from, but fundamentally incoherent with the ideals that much of the anticipated audience had formulated for themselves socially and politically. Eventually this came to manifest in me a significant amount of fear and trepidation regarding whether the message would fall flat in the delivery, or even turn those in the audience who I felt needed to hear what was being said, against me. This fear in turn developed into procrastination. At this point I began to employ much of what I had learned in our solo performance class the year before, in order to start to put some work down on paper. We had been taught about the various fears of starting, choosing, failing and succeeding as all being wrapped up in a similar sort of struggle regarding self-worth and the worthiness of the work being done. Only once I was able to accept that the worth of the piece, and my involvement in it, could only be determined by me did the process of producing it become manageable.

In the course of writing the final piece, I wrote two other pieces that addressed the same themes and ideas, but with the relationship to the audience manifesting differently in each. This is also the point at which my considerations of the technical limitations placed on me, both through the prompt but also through my relative lack of knowledge regarding the practicalities of sound and lighting design, came into play in terms of determining story. In one instance I had written a similar text to the final one, but had written-in significant interaction between the character on stage and a pre-recorded voice-over that would play throughout the piece. In this instance I found the overall product to be messy and incoherent rather than having the power and effect I would have hoped for. I was essentially writing a scene from a film for two people, rather than a scene for the stage for one. In this instance I was not inviting the audience to do any of the

work of creating story for themselves, but rather feeding them something entirely overwrought. Throughout my graduate education the notion had been discussed repeatedly that the audience does much of the work for the performer if only the actor would allow room for the story to breathe and exist in the room. In this case that advice served me well.

The next piece I wrote took the form of an entirely different exploration of the relationship of the audience to the storyteller, wherein the medium of song, specifically lip-syncing, would function as the primary vessel for storytelling, interspersed by spoken text. In this instance I would have been indulging two specific personal desires that were not so much rooted in relevance to story and theme, but rather an attempt to show a side of my abilities rarely explored in my time at the University: song and dance. Admittedly I would have found tremendous value in exploring these mediums in the piece but once again found myself coming up against the hefty technical requirements of the concept. These ultimately turned me away. And indeed the relationship to the audience here, what the piece asked of the viewer, verged slightly on what felt like emotional manipulation. I would have intentionally led the viewer into a feeling of comfort only to turn it on their heads in the latter stages of the piece. While there certainly would have been a value to that approach, I came to appreciate the psychological clarity of what the piece ultimately became. I was okay with living in a world in which the comfort of the viewer was never a primary consideration of the conversation at hand.

The third and final version of the script, the one that was eventually performed, was written by first speaking the monologues of the three characters into a voice recorder, before actually writing them down. This was done for two primary reasons: first, I knew that the words had to take on the quality of being naturally realized, off the cuff and spoken from the heart, even (and perhaps especially) in the case of the bigoted congressman. The themes discussed in the

piece are ones that I turn over in my head regularly, and so I knew that I could spontaneously manifest them, and then edit after-the-fact. Second, I was reminded of one of the key principles engrained in me by my mentors, that there is tremendous value in doing first, getting up on your feet so to speak, and culling and curating second. I had to work against an old tendency of thinking something to death prior to giving it any sort of life.

If this piece found success it was through its honesty and its lack of compromise. In its willingness to simply lay something out for the audience to then take home and reflect on themselves. Were I to continue to develop it I would perhaps widen the scope of the ideas at play. I would touch on more of the issues that I believe inspired the piece in the first place. I would not however go back and hide the ambitions and ideals of the piece in unnecessary nuance and obfuscation. This was an exercise in speaking a personal truth boldly, and taking up space unapologetically, and I am glad for the experience.

I am come of the seed of the people, the people that sorrow;
Who have no treasure but hope,
No riches laid up but a memory of an ancient glory [...]
And I say to my people's masters: Beware.
Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people
Who shall take what ye would not give.
Did ye think to conquer the people, or that law is stronger than life,
And than men's desire to be free?
We will try it out with you,
Ye that have harried and held,
Ye that have bullied and bribed.
Tyrants... hypocrites... liars!

Transition to father

Father: My wife and I would like to take this opportunity right now to offer our sincerest and most heartfelt apologies to those effected by what happened, the families and to the American people. (Oh God this is hard). I understand, I understand people are very angry. I understand people are very upset by what our son has done, Im upset as well. But we don't know we just don't know where he got these ideas in his head. Hes always been a normal normal normal boy, an exceptional boy at times even. Always a good student, and I know, im sorry, I know this is not what you want to hear but I need people to understand, he did not learn these things in our household. And as far as we know he was not very religious! He didn't attend mosque on Fridays he didn't seem to have friends who professed religiously extreme ideas. So please, do not direct your anger at our community, it had nothing to do with this. Certainly in our household he was always taught to love and respect all people. And to respect authority, the police. We simply do not understand. We are outraged as you are, but please know, please know, we have lost a son. We have lost a son, just as the families of those police officers have lost their loved ones and we plead, we plead mercy. He was not in his right mind, he could not possibly be in his right mind to have done what he did. I beg, whoever takes control of this case, you will see a once good boy

a once good child has gone astray, but he was not acting from a place of control, he could not be acting from his own will. I plead your mercy. That's it, please no questions please, give us peace, give us peace.

Transition to congressman

Congressman: Now I represent a district full of humble, hard-working, decent people who are very concerned. Very concerned, our phones have not stopped ringing since yesterday morning. Now I stand before you a democrat, but I represent all sorts of people in my home state and I can tell you to a man that these people are sick, are sick to death of this, of this politically correct culture, this outrage millennial culture where you cannot call something what it is: this was an act of radical islamist terrorism on American soil! As has happened before and as will continue to happen, unless we find some sort of political will to deal with this issue, and this will be an unpopular thing to say in my party but I am willing to work with the president! I am willing to work with the president towards some sort of solution that puts a stop to this problem. People are scared, people are terrified. This this, this guy was born and raised right here in the states. He was born and raised in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Which by the way if no one has taken a look into whats going on in Dearborn, maybe that's where we should start. And if I seem angry, youre damn right im angry. Because eleven. Eleven of Detroit PD's finest in uniform are dead. Will not go home to their families ever again, why? Because we are afraid to call out Jihadism on our own soil. Now this, now this, I understand in this culture where anyone can get on the twitter and say whatever they like, and call me a, they'll call me a a bigot and a islamophone. I don't care, at this point we have reached a crisis, a crisis. And it all of these politically correct, and the millennial types and all of these, who get in the way of us dealing with our problems. Like our forefathers would have dealt with problems. You see something and its telling you, its waving in your face "this is why im here! To hurt and to kill and to change your culture and your way of life!" And yet we go away and we say "oh well we're a diverse nation we love our neighbors" Well what about those cops? They were somebody's neighbor! If you have not read it already I suggest to everyone a book called "A Fire in the West" "A Fire in the West" By James B. White. In this book he details how for centuries the west has led the world in innovation and culture, and has progressed civilization. With the United States of America being at the forefront of the western world's charge to bring the entire world into a state

of civil peace and order. And in this book he describes how ever since the crusades the Islamic world has positioned itself as the number one threat to western progress and enlightenment. With its inherent doctrine of globalism, of one muslim nation that doesn't recognize borders or national sovereignty. You can see that here folks, you can see that in what happened in Detroit yesterday. I encourage every one of my colleagues to read that book.

Transition to the son

Son: I just want a phone call with my mom, that's it I just want to talk to my mom. When can I talk to her? When they showed my folks on the news how did they seem? Are they harassing them? Are there people harassing them?....Is somebody watching out for them? What if somebody tries to hurt them?.....Hey you know your guys roughed me up before I came in here? They roughed me up in the back of the car too. (chuckles) Your guys roughed me up. Can I get something out of that? Can I get like a phone call out of that? Can I have one of those cigarettes? Nice. You know I don't even smoke? It just feels like the right thing to do right now. Nah I don't really feel like talking. Whats the point? You have your guy, Im not hiding anything. Ohhh, that. I don't know? Maybe I had divine protection. You say a little prayer and do the deed, and hope those prayers are answered. And boy were they. What do you think its some sort of dark magic? Think I drank like a potion or something? I don't know what to tell you. They give me a fun name on the news? The mega-jihadi or something, the worlds first real super villain? Lets say I was put on this earth to do what I did, to enact just a liittle bit of justice before you threw me in here. Are you learned man? Do you read? You read poetry? Heres a short one that I read aloud to myself before I did it. Its by this Irish revolutionary, he wrote it before the Easter Rising in 1916. It goes like this: I am come of the seed of the people, the people that sorrow;

Who have no treasure but hope,

No riches laid up but a memory of an ancient glory [...]

And I say to my people's masters: Beware.

Beware of the thing that is coming, beware of the risen people

Who shall take what ye would not give.

Did ye think to conquer the people, or that law is stronger than life,

And than men's desire to be free?

We will try it out with you,

Ye that have harried and held,
Ye that have bullied and bribed.
Tyrants... hypocrites... liars!

Do you know what it felt like as those bullets were hitting me, and just disintegrating into nothing right then and there? It felt like a warm hug from a loved one, each one of them compelling me to go further, do more. Use me? How? How are you gonna make an example, trot me out in front of the cameras? You want me to get on my hands and knees and grovel? You want me to beg the forgiveness of every American who feels like their safety is threatened by what I've done? You will absolutely never get me to do that, you will never get me to take some sort of deal, to revert my energies to something fucking useful. Im glad those jackboots are rotting in the dirt, and if I could I would do it again and again. You know goddam well they did nothing but serve a racist police state, they did nothing but harass, imprison and kill the weak and the downtrodden and people with dark skin. They did nothing but serve the interests of capital and private property. Don't believe me? Look how Detroit PD's been "dealing with the homelessness crisis?" By beating it to a bloody pulp. I'll bet you know exactly what that looks like. And you, you fucking people with your order and civility and suits and your righteous indignation and those fucking haircuts, and your insufferable politics with the squabbling about republicans and democrats as if there's some sort of moral distinction between the abuser and the enabler. We're coming for all of you. Every last one. Right now all over the world there are a million, two million little brown boys and girls whose hearts are breaking as they realize that the sword is in fact far mightier than the pen, and the best way to use that sword is to cut down every square jawed white motherfucker whose coming at them with the freedom and democracy nonsense. I spit on you and on those cops. Fuck you, you did this, you did.

**The Rebel* by Patrick Pearse is in the public domain